

VZCZCXRO1174  
PP RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNH  
DE RUEHKL #0105/01 0501016  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 191016Z FEB 08  
FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0548  
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0749  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0384  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 2468  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHHMUNA/USCINCPAC HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUALA LUMPUR 000105

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MTS AND DRL -- JANE KIM

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [KDEM](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: INDIAN "ROSE RALLY" DOUSED BY POLICE

REF: A. 07 KUALA LUMPUR 1710 - HINDRAF LEADERS DETAINED

UNDER ISA

- [1](#)B. 07 KUALA LUMPUR 1684 - INDIAN GRIEVANCES AND TENSIONS
- [1](#)C. 07 KUALA LUMPUR 1647 - POLICE BREAK-UP INDIAN PROTEST
- [1](#)D. 07 KUALA LUMPUR 1646 - POLICE DETAIN INDIAN ACTIVISTS

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: An ethnic Indian demonstration on February 16 by the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF), in the form of a march to present roses to Malaysia's Prime Minister, met with a stiff police response, including use of water cannon, tear gas and arrests. With probably less than a thousand people on the street, the event did not approach the 20,000 or so protesters that joined HINDRAF's November 25 demonstration, which startled the nation. Prime Minister Abdullah condemned the organizers as "extremists" out to disrupt the upcoming elections. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) HINDRAF leaders organized a "rose rally" on February 16 in Kuala Lumpur, representing HINDRAF's first attempt to stage a major demonstration since their large November 25 protest startled the ruling National Front government and the public. The rally's objective was for HINDRAF supporters to march to the Parliament building to symbolically deliver roses to the Prime Minister as a means to press their campaign for ethnic Indian rights and highlight the plight of HINDRAF leaders detained without trial under the Internal Security Act (ISA). HINDRAF called for 200 children to lead a peaceful march of 10,000 protesters. HINDRAF's leader, P. Waythamoorthy, now residing in London in de facto exile, said the roses represented both the Malaysian-Indian community's love for Malaysia and desire for justice for the five detained HINDRAF leaders (ref A). Police denied a permit for the event and released a public warning the day prior to the planned demonstration. Assistant Police Commissioner Ahmad Sofian stated the march was illegal and that police had not granted a permit on the grounds of "security and public order," and likely traffic disruptions. He also stated that parents who brought their children to the protest could be charged for compromising their children's safety.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Police erected road blocks in the vicinity of Parliament and checked ethnic Indian members of the public beginning in the early morning hours of February 16. The march was meant to begin at 10:00 a.m., but police used tear gas and water cannons on the assembling crowd as early as 8:30 a.m. One journalist poloff spoke with estimated the

crowd was close to 2,000 when the police first used tear gas, though most observers placed the number below one thousand. At mid-morning Poloff observed about 300 protesters in the area of Merdeka (Independence) Square, including a few children with roses. The police gathered in strength, including riot police and three water canons deployed around Merdeka Square and effectively interdicted HINDRAF supporters trying to assemble in the area. The demonstration never gained coherence and was dealt with quickly by the police before most press and observers were on the scene to witness events. Police arrested at least 162 individuals during the day. All were later released without charges except for the eight protest organizers, who were freed on bail by February 18. The Kuala Lumpur-based Al Jazeera news team provided international media coverage of the attempted demonstration, including police use of tear gas and arrests.

14. (SBU) Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi in public comments on February 16 labeled HINDRAF an "extremist group," claiming the march was designed to disrupt the general election, now planned for March 8. Abdullah said, "People who disrupt the elections do not respect the democratic process. When there is disorder, the people do not come out to vote for fear of getting caught in fights." He also condemned the use of children in the protest, saying it placed the children at risk.

15. (SBU) Comment: Police warnings and threats of arrest, roadblocks, and use of water cannon and tear gas doused HINDRAF's attempted "rose rally," and kept the number of would-be protesters to a minimum. The government continues to downplay HINDRAF's impact, and to describe its activists as dangerous extremists. Nevertheless, HINDRAF's actions have forced the government to engage in damage control by

KUALA LUMP 00000105 002 OF 002

turning official attention, at least rhetorically, to Indian community concerns in the run-up to the March 8 national election.

KEITH